

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 EUR-08 IO-03 SP-02

PM-03 L-01 INR-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 SAM-01 PRS-01 SSO-00

INRE-00 /050 W

----- 012126

O R 131114Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5598

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 0990

LIMDIS

DAMASCUS PLEASE PASS TO SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OFOR, IS, EG, XF

SUBJ: RABIN KNESSET STATEMENT RE CONDITIONS FOR
WITHDRAWAL FROM PASSES AND OILFIELDS

SUMMARY: RABIN'S FEBRUARY 12 KNESSET REMARKS, CONDITIONING
ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM EITHER PASSES OR OILFIELDS ON EGYPTIAN NON-
BELLIGERENCY COMMITMENT, HAVE EVOKED CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS.
LIKUD OPPOSITION LEADER BEGIN CLAIMS THAT THEY CONSTITUTE HARDENING
OF GOI NEGOTIATING POSITION, WHILE ALLON INSISTS THAT THERE HAS BEEN
NO CHANGE. WHILE ANY STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER FROM KNESSET
PODIUM HAS MORE SIGNIFICANCE THAN REMARKS TO MEDIA OR PRIVATE
COMMENTS, WE ARE NOT INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THERE HAS BEEN A
SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE OF POLICY. IT SEEMS TO ME, HOWEVER, THAT HIS
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FORMULATION HINTS AT A SLIGHT HARDENING OF POSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER RABIN, REPLYING IN KNESSET FEB 12 TO MOTION PRESENTED BY HERUT (LIKUD) LEADER MENAGEM BEGIN RE GOI STANCE ON NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT, STATED THAT PASSES AND OILFIELDS WOULD REMAIN IN ISRAELI HANDS UNLESS EGYPT RENOUNCED STATE OF WAR. SPEAKING WITHOUT PREPARED TEXT OR NOTES, RABIN SAID "WITHOUT EGYPT GIVING UP ITS MILITARY INTENTIONS, WE SHALL NOT GIVE UP THE PASSES AS AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSE LINE NOR RPT NOR THE OIL FIELDS AT ABU RODEIS AS AN ECONOMIC RESOURCE OF THE FIRST ORDER". (EMBASSY TRANSLATION FROM HAARETZ FEB 13 COVERAGE OF KNESSET DEBATE).

2. RABIN WENT ON TO SAY, "I REPEAT: IT WOULD BE THE HAPPIEST DAY OF MY LIFE IF I COULD COME AND SAY: AN AGREEMENT HAS BEEN SIGNED BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN AND ISRAELI GOVERNMENTS WHOSE MEANING IS THAT THERE WILL BE NO MORE WAR; THAT THE WAY TO PROGRESS TOWARDS PEACE WILL BE THROUGH DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE SIDES; THAT EGYPT DOES NOT SEE HERSELF LINKED TO WHATEVER HAPPENS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ANY OTHER ARAB COUNTRY; THAT THE TERRITORY ISRAEL WILL VACATE WILL BE TRULY DEMILITARIZED. IF WE COULD GET TO SUCH A THING IN EXCHANGE FOR THE PASSES AND ABU ROEIS, I AM CERTAIN THAT THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL WOULD SEE IT AS THE OPENING OF A GREAT HOPE."

3. RABIN'S STATEMENT CONSTITUTES MORE POINTED REFORMULATION OF REMARKS HE MADE IN ENGLISH ON ABC TELEVISION FEB 7 (FBIS TEL AVIV 08 1233Z) IN WHICH, IN ANSWER TO A SPECIFIC QUESTION, HE SAID THAT HE WOULD RECOMMEND TO GOVERNMENT THAT PASSES AND OILFIELDS BE GIVEN BACK IN EXCHANGE FOR WRITTEN COMMITMENT OF NONBELLIGERENCY AND DEFINITE GUARANTEES BY THE EGYPTIANS. RABIN SAID THAT SUCH COMMITMENT WOULD HAVE TO TAKE FORM OF SIGNED LEGAL DOCUMENT IN WHICH EGYPT AND ISRAEL MAKE COMMITMENTS VIS-A-VIS EACH OTHER.

4. ISRAELI POLITICAL PERSONALITIES ARE DIVIDED AS TO SIGNIFICANCE OF RABIN'S KNESSET REMARKS. FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON TOLD JERUSALEM POST REPORTER THAT THEY DID NOT RPT NOT CONSTITUTE HARDENING OF GOI NEGOTIATING POSITION. OPPOSITION LEADER BEGIN ON OTHER HAND SAID WITH APPARENT SATISFACTION "THAT WAS AN IMPORTANT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER".

5. INITIAL ISRAELI PRESS COMMENTARY IS LIMITED. ENGLISH-LANGUAGE
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JERUSALEM POST IS THE ONLY PAPER WHICH INTERPRETS RABIN'S KNESSET STATEMENT AS A HARDENING OF ISRAELI NEGOTIATING POSITION, SIGNIFICANT BOTH FOR ITS CONTENTS AND ITS TIMING. POST NOTES THAT RABIN HAS NOW COMMITTED HIMSELF PUBLICLY TO A POSITION WHICH HERETOFORE HE HAD DELIBERATELY LEFT OBSCURE. POST ALSO VIEWS GOI PRESENTATION TO SECRETARY AND RABIN'S KNESSET REMARKS AS SYNTHESIS OF VIEWS IN ISRAELI CABINET, WITH RABIN AND ALLON MOVING TOWARDS POSITION OF PERES.

6. OTHER ISRAELI PRESS DO NOT RPT NOT INTERPRET RABIN'S KNESSET REMARK AS SIGNIFICANT NEW DEVELOPMENT. HAARETZ EDITORIAL ASSUMES THAT RABIN MADE SAME STATEMENT TO SECREARY IN PRIVATE. DAVAR AND MAARIV BOTH EMPHASIZE FACT THAT RABIN SPOKE IN CONFIDENT AND RELAXED MANNER, WITHOUT NOTES OR TEXT, AND THAT KNESSET AUDIENCE FOUND HIM MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN IN HIS USUALLY FORMAL APPEARANCES.

7. COMMENT: IT IS PERHAPS INEVITABLE THAT GOI LEADERS AND OPPOSITION GIVE CONTRARY INTERPRETATIONS TO RABIN'S FEB 12 STATEMENT. RIGHTWING OPPOSITION BELIEVES THAT BY FORCING RABIN TO SPELL OUT ISRAEL REQUIREMENT FOR WITHDRAWAL FROM EITHER PASSES OR OILFIELDS, IT HAS ACHIEVED A SIGNIFICANT HARDENING OF GOI NEGOTIATING POSITION. WE TEND TO AGREE, HOWEVER, WITH VIEW EXPRESSED BY FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE OF POLICY. IT SEEMS TO ME, HOWEVER, THAT HIS FORMULATION HINTS AT A SLIGHT HARDENING OF POSITION. MOREOVER, ANY STATEMENT MADE BY PRIME MINISTER FROM KNESSET PODIUM CARRIES FORMAL IMPRIMATUR AND IS THEREFORE MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN TV INTERVIEW AND MORE DIFFICULT LATER TO ALTER.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION, GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TELAV00990
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750052-0686
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750244/aaaabnkm.tel
Line Count: 136
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 MAY 2003 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <19 MAY 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RABIN KNESSET STATEMENT RE CONDITIONS FOR WITHDRAWAL FROM PASSES AND OILFIELDS
TAGS: PINT, IS, EG, (KARPOLA, REINO), (PEKKARINEN, PENTTI)
To: DAMASCUS STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006